

**Project summary:** One Book, More Legacies, aims to equip Burundian youth with engaging experiences and knowledge to examine our historical realities and reimagine decolonized futures. The project is a fascinating experiential initiative that will purchase 250 outstanding books from prominent Burundian authors. The proposed book series is as follows: Trésors du Burundi ancestral by Perpétue MIGANDA, Le Burundi ancien: l'économie du pouvoir de 1875 à 1920 by Augustin NSANZE, Ethnisme et tragédies au Burundi: de l'identité nationale à l'identité ethnique by André NIKWIGIZE, Entre deux mondes: d'une génération à l'autre by Michel KAYOYA, and Pour la Dignité paysanne by Déogratias NIYONKURU. Next, two young people aged 18 to 25 will be selected from each of 25 different private and public high schools and colleges in the most diverse country's provinces, Bujumbura, Gitega, and Ngozi, to engage in a 10-weekday critical reading seminar on the book series. At the end of the program, each participant will receive the exact book series to donate to their respective former or current institutions' libraries. This endeavor will not only provide access to critical books that are often unavailable in most educational spaces and too expensive for most young people. But also, it will stimulate legacies that promote inclusivity, mutual respect, solidarity, and the exchange of ideas related to contemporary life experiences and ideals. The objective of this remarkable program will be to collectively explore indigenous conceptions of life, spiritual and moral ideals, environmentalism, cultural values, customs and taboos, ethnic antagonisms, and violence, to name the least, to understand our realities better. Hence, this project will illuminate how preserving collective memory builds resilience, social change, and peace to hopefully generate solutions that will contribute to the development of Burundi.

**Background and Motivation:** Growing up in Burundi, a small country still recovering from the colonial legacies and the evils of the civil wars that followed, I recognize that access to books has yet to become a priority for educational and family institutions. It is sad to admit that in my list of hundreds of consequential books already read, ten books by Burundian authors do not appear. In high school, I had access to more Eurocentric, American, and African books, resulting from donations from the Burundian diaspora and foreign cultural agencies. These books have incredibly broadened my horizons and made me a critical thinker. Still, they bring to light the complex reality of being disconnected from the history of our ancestors and Burundian identity. The feeling of confusion and limitation in understanding the country's collective history, directly linked to self-knowledge, has dominated over the years. This leads me to question the number of young Burundians with whom I share this story, especially those growing up in less favorable conditions. What forces in place, consciously and unconsciously, disconnect us from that collective memory and ultimately disrupt peace and resilience?

Moreover, central development agencies such as the World Bank, the European Union, and the Burundian government have recently been working hard to stimulate economic growth to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion. Nonetheless, there needs to be more emphasis on preserving collective memories and national ideological narratives, encouraging social change and peace. Therefore, this reality inspires me to advocate for the consciousness that native literature retains evidence-based knowledge that promotes the preservation of Burundian identity and development action. There is a need to create opportunities for young people to read between the emotions and perspectives of their ancestors to think critically about contemporary issues and narratives that are not usually questioned. Development institutions and peacemakers must recognize that they invest less effort in preserving Burundian identity, remarkably conveyed in literary works. Hence, the proposed project maintains that most issues we currently face can fade once we become more connected to where we came from through the lens of our collective memory.

**Implementation:** First, in late May 2023, the project will purchase 250 books by well-known Burundian authors on Amazon or Burundian bookstores. The proposed book series is as follows: Trésors du Burundi ancestral by Perpétue MIGANDA, Le Burundi ancien: l'économie du pouvoir de 1875 à 1920 by Augustin NSANZE, Ethnisme et tragédies au Burundi: de l'identité nationale à l'identité ethnique by André NIKWIGIZE, Entre deux mondes: d'une génération à l'autre by Michel KAYOYA, and Pour la Dignité paysanne by Déogratias NIYONKURU. I chose these books because they provide insightful information on indigenous conceptions of life, spiritual and moral ideals, environmentalism, cultural values, customs and taboos, ethnic antagonisms, and violence. And in early June, I plan to travel to Burundi to set up the project under the directive of Miss Chantal NTIMA. She is endowed with rare emotional intelligence and

shares Burundi's beauty and resilience with the youth. She also mentors young people with ambitions and initiatives daily to help create value-added businesses for the Burundian economy, and it will be an honor to work with her.

Secondly, one week will be dedicated to selecting participants for the seminar, which will take place over a two-week sequence. I will ask a couple of famous social media pages to post the application form to reach as many young people as possible from various backgrounds. Next, 50 young people aged 18 to 25 will be selected from multiple private and public high schools and colleges in three provinces—Bujumbura, Gitega, and Ngozi. There will be two young people selected from 25 different institutions in total. The selected participants will engage in a 10-weekday critical reading seminar on the book series, which will be held either in the library of the ADISCO, of which Miss Chantal NTIMA is the Deputy Secretary-General, or at the Institut Français du Burundi. As a blogger and scholar, I will lead the sessions alongside other bloggers, writers, and leaders. In particular, participants will be given small stipends to help cover public transportation to and from the seminar venue, but also as motivation to finish the whole program. This project is limited to this age group in these three provinces because they bring together the majority of diverse youth from other regions born mainly during the transition to the peace period. Therefore, it will be a unique opportunity for more young people from different backgrounds and personalities to engage in intellectual and insightful discussions that helps them better understand their realities.

Finally, in mid-June, the program will launch the critical reading seminar on the book series. Participants must read a book section as assigned for every workshop beforehand to facilitate the discussion. Then they will write a short reflection paragraph to be posted on the program's created social media page(Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter). In particular, the participants will be encouraged to share their writings on their accounts to continue discussions with their peers. Last but not least, in early July, each participant will receive the exact book series to donate to their respective institutions to stimulate legacies that promote inclusivity, mutual respect, solidarity, and the exchange of ideas that link past and contemporary life experiences and ideals. In a nutshell, 25 high schools and colleges will benefit from this project by receiving a small but valuable donation of 10 books.

**Sustainability:** The project will take participants on a journey to explore new facets of Indigenous cultures and ways of thinking and help them communicate well and interpret their thoughts and feelings, focusing on peace, tolerance, and reconciliation. The project will help me, and other young people spend the summer productively and purposefully thinking about our collective future. More importantly, the sustainability of this pilot project will be anchored in the vision it channels through the generations: to see young people learn from their ancestors and equip themselves with social and intellectual tools to embrace their future serenely. The project argues that critical reading empowers people to form evidence-based opinions and assumptions and become more aware of forces that might exploit them. Moreover, through dialogue, young people learn to respect differences in ideas, beliefs, and thoughts, which is a fundamental basis for promoting peace. This program will thus develop a sense of community among these young people who will strive to seek ways to encourage peace beyond the summer program. Eventually, I will speak with selected candidates to get feedback on the program's approach and plan accordingly to continue the initiative once I return to the United States.

**Who am I?:** Breille Irahoza is a junior international student from Burundi, East Africa. I'm an environmental studies major at Vassar College, and French & Francophone studies correlate. My primary qualifications for this Davis peace project include my knowledge of Burundi and Kirundi, the country's native language, and French. So I will have no challenge communicating and interacting with the participants during the trip. More importantly, in recent years, I have been committed to helping fill the void by supporting causes that gradually become more personal by advocating for positive change. As a Vassar Student Philanthropy Council board member and Co-vice president for events and outreach in the Vassar Haiti Project, I have realized that my small efforts have gradually had a tangible positive impact. In my perspective, peace is the full right to active and authentic collective memories, which bring about healing and reconciliation in a post-colonial context and appeased ethnic antagonism. Hence, I am eager to discover the often unseen contribution of literary works in constructing collective memory that promotes peace and social change.